

To
Rudyard Kipling

This Volume is respectfully dedicated
by the
Students of the Junior Year
of
McGill University
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Courtesy of Montreal Star

Ad Universitatem

PRINCIPAL PETERSON, most learned fellow Doctors, and You discreet and well conducted Students of our University: According to the ancient and laudable custom of the schools, I, as one of your wandering scholars returned, have been instructed to speak to you. The only penalty youth must pay for its enviable privileges is that of listening to people known, alas, to be older and alleged to be wiser. On such occasions youth feigns an air of polite interest and reverence, while age tries to look virtuous. Which pretences sit uneasily on both of them.

On such occasions very little truth is spoken. I will try not to depart from the convention. I will not tell you how the sins of youth are due very largely to its virtues; how its arrogance is very often the result of its innate shyness; how its brutality is the outcome of its natural virginity of spirit. These things are true, but your preceptors might object to such texts

without the proper notes and emendations. But I can try to speak to you more or less truthfully on certain matters to which you may give the attention and belief proper to your years.

When, to use a detestable phrase, you go out into the battle of life you will be confronted by an organized conspiracy which will try to make you believe that the world is governed by the idea of wealth for wealth's sake, and that all means which lead to the acquisition of that wealth are, if not laudable, at least expedient. Those of you who have fitly imbibed the spirit of our University—and it was not a materialistic university which trained a scholar to take both the Craven and the Ireland in England—will violently resent that thought, but you will live, and eat, and move, and have your being in a world dominated by that thought. Some of you will probably succumb to the poison of it.

Now, I do not ask you not to be carried away by the first rush of the great game of life. That is expecting you to be more than human. But I do ask you, after the first heat of the game, that you draw breath and watch your fellows for a while. Sooner or later you will see some man to whom the idea of wealth as mere wealth does not appeal, whom the methods of amassing that wealth do not interest, and who will not accept money if you offer it to him at a certain price.

At first you will be inclined to laugh at this man and to think that he is not smart in his ideas. I suggest that you watch him closely, for he will presently demonstrate to you that money dominates everybody except the man who does not want money. You may meet that man on your farm, in your village, or in your legislature. But be sure that, whenever or wherever you meet him, as soon as it comes to a direct issue between you, his little finger will be thicker than your loins. You will go in fear of him: he will not go in fear of you. You will do what he wants: he will not do what you want. You will find that you have no weapon in your armoury with which you can attack him; no argument with which you can appeal to him. Whatever you gain, he will gain more.

I would like you to study that man. I would like you better to be that man, because from the lower point of view it doesn't pay to be obsessed by the desire of wealth for wealth's sake. If more wealth

is necessary to you, for purposes not your own, use your left hand to acquire it, but keep your right for your proper work in life. If you employ both arms in that game you will be in danger of stooping; in danger also of losing your soul. But in spite of everything you may succeed, you may be successful, you may acquire enormous wealth. In which case I warn you that you stand in grave danger of being spoken and written of and pointed out as a smart man. And that is one of the most terrible calamities that can overtake a sane, civilized, white man in our Empire to-day.

They say youth is the season of hope, ambition, and uplift—that the last word youth needs is an exhortation to be cheerful. Some of you here know, and I remember, that youth can be a season of great depression, despondencies, doubts, and waverings, the worse because they seem to be peculiar to ourselves and incommunicable to our fellows. There is a certain darkness into which the soul of the young man some time descends—a horror of desolation, abandonment, and realized worthlessness, which is one of the most real of the hells in which we are compelled to walk.

I know of what I speak. This is due to a variety of causes, the chief of which is the egotism of the human animal itself. But I can tell you for your comfort that the chief cure for it is to interest yourself, to lose yourself, in some issue not personal to yourself—in another man's trouble, or, preferably, another man's joy. But if the dark hour does not vanish, as sometimes it doesn't; if the black cloud will not lift, as sometimes it will not; let me tell you again for your comfort that there are many liars in the world, but there are no liars like our own sensations. The despair and the horror mean nothing, because there is for you nothing irremediable, nothing ineffaceable, nothing irrecoverable in anything you may have said or thought or done. If for any reason you cannot believe or have not been taught to believe in the infinite mercy of Heaven which has made us all and will take care we do not go far astray, at least believe that you are not yet sufficiently important to be taken too seriously by the powers above us or beneath us. In other words take anything and everything seriously except yourselves.

I regret that I noticed certain signs of irreverent laughter when I alluded to the word "smartness." I have no message to deliver, but if I had a message to deliver to a University which I love, to the young

men who have the future of their country to mould. I would say with all the force at my command: Do not be smart. If I were not a Doctor of this University with a deep interest in its discipline, and if I did not hold the strongest views on that reprehensible form of amusement known as "rushing," I would say that whenever and wherever you find one of your dear little playmates showing signs of smartness in his work, his talk, or his play, take him tenderly by the hand, by both hands, by the back of the neck if necessary, and lovingly, playfully but firmly, lead him to a knowledge of higher and more interesting things.

(Courtesy of the University Magazine.)

